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Kelly McParland: The hypocrisy of faith-based environmentalism? Its preachers have failed to deliver

It's hard to keep the flock under control if the high priests can't be trusted

Kelly McParland

Published Jul 03, 2018 • 5 minute read

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks during the signing ceremony for the Paris Agreement on climate change, April 22, 2016.
PHOTO BY TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Jerry Brown was castigating the current resident of the White House the other day for his attitude towards climate change.

"I don't think President Trump has a fear of the Lord, the fear of the wrath of God, which leads one to more humility," scolded Brown, who is in his final months as governor of California due to term limits. "And this is such a reckless disregard for the truth and for the existential consequences that can be unleashed."

Brown famously trained as a Jesuit priest, so his theological hyperbole is entirely in character. But it also underlines an aspect of climate doctrine that threatens the very message he hopes to deliver.

Environmentalists long ago turned to faith as a recruitment tool. It was far easier and more effective than trying to explain the science, which was neither simple nor straightforward, is troubled by inconsistencies and challenged by dissidents in any case. Critics could simply be dismissed as heretics and be done with it. In the old days doubters might have been banished or burned; in current society it's

enough to subject them to ridicule on late-night television and progressive social media sites. If you want to be one with the chosen people you have to accept the full canon of beliefs, and environmental purity is right at the top of the list.

But reliance on faith comes with a caveat. It rests heavily on the integrity of its clergy. It's hard to keep the flock under control if the high priests can't be trusted. The Catholic Church has long struggled with the failings of its leadership, most recently in the abuse of the vulnerable and Rome's determined effort to hide the evidence. Islam's greatest struggle is its perversion by radicals to sell violence and terror.



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In Canada, the climate clergy hasn't been delivering for quite some time now. Liberals did themselves absolutely no good whatsoever by loudly and regularly declaiming the firmness of their devotion to the United Nations' climate agenda, and then publicly straying time and again. They did nothing about Kyoto other than sign on, failing to implement its conditions or keep to their promises. They sent an enormous delegation to Paris in 2016, largely to posture shamelessly and telegraph their virtue. They elevated true believer Stéphane Dion to the party leadership in 2006, then utterly fumbled the attempt to remake Canada's economy with environmental integrity as its basis.

The provinces have done nothing to help bring about a transformation. British Columbia has steadily corrupted the carbon tax it introduced in 2008 by turning it into just another revenue-raiser for a spending-addicted government. Alberta's Premier Rachel Notley argued she could successfully marry a "progressive" emissions-reduction program to a pipeline-building plan by trading the introduction of a carbon tax for recognition by other provinces of its need to ship its oil to export markets. She kept her end of the bargain only to have fellow leaders in B.C., Ontario and Quebec respond with obstructionism and weasel words in return.

Quebec, as usual, wants it both ways. It helped block the entirely-sensible Energy East project and has imposed tough restrictions on energy development within its borders while happily accepting annual equalization payments of \$11 billion or more financed heavily by provinces that depend on the oil and gas business for their livelihood. Ontario's Liberals strutted their environmental sensitivities for 15 years while saddling the province with crushing contracts, costly subsidies and botched innovations. A leading complaint of the voters who finally tossed them from office last month was the mess made of a power industry that was once a source of local pride.

As a result, the people who continue to demand adherence to the faith have little in the way of believability. B.C. Premier John Horgan is obstinately doing all he can to block the expansion of a pipeline from Alberta that carries very little risk and comes swathed in protections, while happily helping Donald Trump revive America's coal industry by serving as its biggest exporter. Albertans fume in frustration as a small phalanx of activists work to put them out of work, while Vancouver's Westshore Terminals loads three times the entire exports of the U.S. West Coast, to be sent off to Asian buyers to pour emissions into the atmosphere. Coal is B.C.'s biggest export commodity, just as Alberta would do with oil, except that coal is far worse for the planet.

The failings and hypocrisies of faith-based environmentalism are the biggest reason doubts are rising across much of the country. Resistance in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and now Ontario has put Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's planned carbon tax under serious threat. Ontario chose Progressive Conservative leader Doug Ford as premier over the Liberals' Kathleen Wynne on an explicit promise to kill her carbon pricing and wage war against Trudeau's. One of his first actions was to cancel programs that handed out free thermostats and rebates on new windows. Complaints from solar firms that subsidies are all that kept them going only supported the Tories' claim that money was being poured into firms propped up by government ideology rather than public demand.

There has to be real doubt whether Trudeau will press ahead with his tax plan in the face of such significant public skepticism. The Liberals are struggling with a host of problems that threaten greater and more immediate pain to the country, not least the trade relationship with the U.S., a looming tariff war and the unpredictability of the loose cannon in the White House. Ottawa says it will impose a carbon levy on provinces that fail to comply by 2019; that would see the government adding to costs for every consumer just months before it seeks re-election, very possibly at a time its disagreements with Washington are already having a negative impact on jobs and the economy.

It is clearly nervous. It won't answer demands for a firm price on the cost to Canadians. Its poll numbers are down and the opposition is making gains. Liberal hopes for re-election depend on their standing in Quebec and Ontario. Is it realistic to believe they would risk the wrath of Ontarians by enforcing a tax they have just repudiated?

Environmentalists have long depended on a doctrine that demands followers sacrifice practical concerns on the basis of faith in a greater good. That good hasn't been brought about, and its preachers have failed miserably to deliver, while erecting enormous castles of influence to themselves. They might have been better off leaving theology out of it. When a priesthood is discredited, the religion itself suffers.

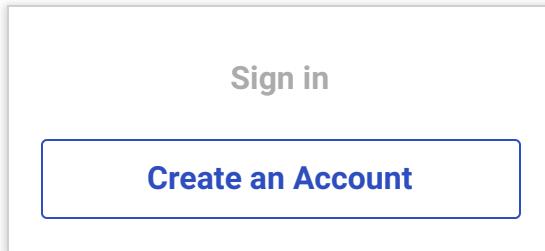
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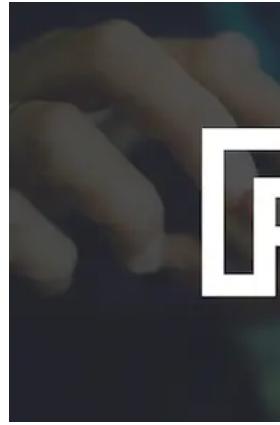
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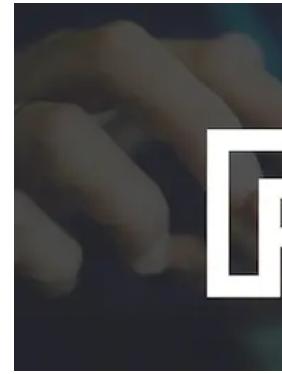


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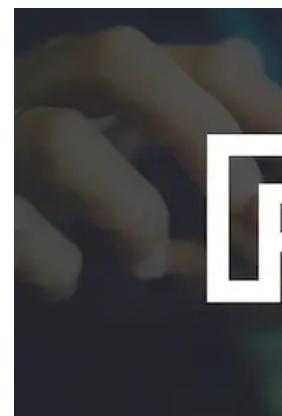
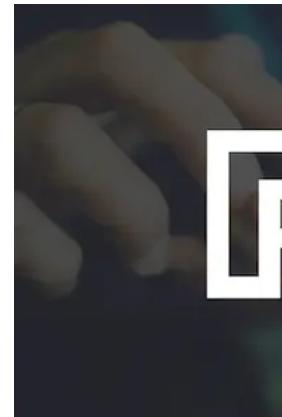
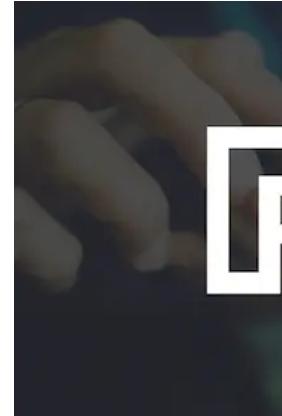
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